Studying College-Community Relations in New York State

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WHAT COMMON STAKE do adult educators, colleges, and communities have in college-community cooperation? What forms is such cooperation taking? How effective is it?

A search for answers to such questions was launched in New York State last year through the University-Community Cooperation Project (UCCP). Appropriately, this study of cooperation was itself a cooperative venture undertaken by the New York State Citizens' Council with the Association of Colleges and Universities and the State University of New York.

Benjamin Fine summed up a major conclusion of the study in a *New York Times* article: "The old conception of the college or university as an ivory tower is out of date. No longer do colleges put a wall about the campus and withdraw from reality. Town and gown come closer together than at any time in educational history. Evidence of college-community cooperation is seen at every hand." (*New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1954.) Taking a look at such evidence was the first assignment of the UCCP.

Self-education by participants was a recognized objective of the project from its inception. This education began during exploratory discussions in the Citizens' Council Board, in the Association Executive Committee, and among State University officials. The Annual Institute of Community Leadership of the Citizens' Council in June, 1953, provided both a platform for announcing the new project and a workshop, first, to consider what communities want from local colleges and, second, to take a quick look at how a few colleges and communities are working together to meet such demands.

A next step was the organization of an Advisory Committee of 30 persons from college and community. An all-day session on a hot Saturday last July set a vigorous pace for a working group that has sustained a remarkably high degree of responsible commitment.

After feeling its way through preliminary definition of terms and of philosophical differences and agreements, the committee got down to three questions:

1. How can the study be limited to keep it within the bounds of time and resources available?
2. How should procedures be organized for gathering the facts?
3. How can what the community expects and would like be determined?

Partial answers came after much discussion, largely in small sub-groups. To sharpen the focus of what the study would look for, the committee adopted as its yardstick the "plus element idea" which it defined as "the emerging practices which are relatively unique and may be experimental as contrasted with common and well tested practices . . .

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practices concerned with dynamic problems of living in a modern community. These practices will most often involve students and/or college staff personnel participating actively and creatively, usually together with citizens of the community."

Study Procedures

It was agreed the procedures should aim at maximum participation within the institutions to be studied "in the hopes that this would set the stage in many parts of the state simultaneously for continuing study." The committee faced problems of limited staff (the full time of one person and a secretary with all other man-power volunteered) and limited time (four months from start to printed finish). It also faced the challenge of making this more than a one-man survey destined to gather dust on a shelf. That the report was completed on schedule and presented to the Association of Colleges and Universities Annual Meeting on December 3 and the Citizens' Council Board meeting on December 4 is due to the fact that some 5,000 man hours were contributed.

Procedures relying upon written questionnaires or upon visits by a two-three man team were considered but rejected in favor of visiting and host teams for each institution studied, somewhat similar to those effectively employed in the Cooperative Program in Educational Administration of the Middle Atlantic Region. Ideally, each team would include community representatives and students as well as faculty and administration.

At the end of the day these assumptions had been "pretty well accepted":

1. That there is a need for closer college-community relations;
2. That it is possible to determine what college-community relations are;
3. That it is possible to improve these relations;
4. That only interested colleges should and could be involved in the project;
5. That what is being done already will be encouraged and strengthened;
6. That we can't cover all colleges and universities in the study;
7. That self-appraisal by the colleges involved is sound procedure;
8. That what is being studied here is a big job that may lead on to other studies;
9. That we can't let the study be so ambitious as to make its completion impossible within two to four months.

Subsequent meetings of the Advisory Committee resulted in (1) the development of a Study Manual containing suggested procedures for host and visiting teams and a preliminary questionnaire to department heads, a preliminary information sheet on the college and the community, and a reporting guide; (2) the selection of

*These institutions were:

Albany Region: Bard College, New York State College for Teachers at Albany, Siena College, State Teachers College at New Paltz, Union College, Vassar College; *Buffalo Region*: Canisius College, Jamestown Community College, New York State College for Teachers at Buffalo, University of Buffalo; *New York City Region*: College of the City of New York, Columbia University, Fordham University, Hunter College of the College of the City of New York, New York University, Queens College of the College of the City of New York; *Rochester Region*: Alfred University, Cornell University, Hobart College, Keuka College, University of Rochester; *Syracuse Region*: Colgate University, Mohawk Valley Technical Institute, St. Lawrence University, State Teachers College at Potsdam, Syracuse University.

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26 institutions* (about one out of three in the state) differing as to size, type, indication of interest, location, and probable extent of present program; (3) a "dry run" study of one institution to test procedures and communications; (4) the organization of some 400 people—educators, community representatives, students—into 26 host and 26 visiting teams. Excellent cooperation from the 26 institutions to be studied and from 31 others in the state which helped man the visiting teams made this possible.

The "dry run" confirmed the committee's decision to use host and visiting teams and to have an evening session beginning with dinner prior to the all-day visitation. Even in the brief "dry run" visit both visitors and hosts recognized the dynamic potential of this kind of aided self-study.

Warm hospitality on the part of each institution visited reflected genuine interest in the study and set the stage for friendly, informal investigation. Each report was written by the host team and usually edited by the chairman. Evidence of the cooperative spirit which marked the study was the speed with which the 26 reports came to the Citizens' Council Office. Here the director, after sending a copy of each report to the college for correction, undertook to achieve some kind of initial order. A tentative draft was sent to the Advisory Committee prior to a two-day meeting to put the report into final form. To a marked degree even the actual writing and editing was a group effort.

Findings of the Study

So much for procedures. What did the study reveal? First, that a variety of methods are being used to initiate and achieve college-community cooperation. While the focus would have been sharper and the reports probably briefer had all the teams applied the "plus element" yardstick more rigidly, the 300-odd examples of college-community cooperation paint a rich and varied picture and testify to a tremendous reservoir of good will and services available to communities. They also reflect a dynamic approach to the job of educating students for effective community living.

In summarizing the findings, the Advisory Committee felt that five methods were clearly identified.

1. Utilization by the college of the skills, abilities, and education of persons within the community for the purpose of enriching the educational process. (One example cited went beyond the familiar one-shot appearance of a resource person in a given class and found an able group of people, representing organized labor, management, women's organizations, government, and other community groups, interested enough to take part for an entire week in a class dealing with the community.)

2. Utilization by the college of the community as a laboratory for the purpose of advancing the educational process. (A few teams reported coordinated field service programs with staff time assigned to coordination, direction, and evaluation. Others reported experimental work in apprenticing students to community organizations.)

3. Initiation by the college of projects requiring coordination of community resources for the growth of the community. (Several visiting teams reported cultural programs—arts festival, community symphony, etc.—initiated by the college but now functioning as cooperative projects and contributing much to the enrichment of college and community life.

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Others reported similar projects in the area of physical planning.)

4. Initiation by the college of community undertakings in which the college functions merely as one of many agencies within the community. (An outstanding example here is an urban redevelopment project with office and professional staff now being carried out by the major institutions within the area.)

5. Development by college and community of mutually beneficial undertakings. (One team described a successful joint approach to a common need for hospital facilities. A number of other examples involve services to special interest groups—labor and industry, for instance—along lines of communications, leadership training, research.)

Next Steps

The study has been envisioned as the first step in a continuing process. Next steps have been suggested by the Advisory Committee. Some of these have been acted on, others are in process, still others will take place or be outlined at the Tenth Annual Institute of the Citizens' Council, June 17-20 at Hobart College. In brief, recommendations concern distribution of the report (requests both in New York and from 26 other states indicate wide interest); further study and evaluation of the report by the sponsoring bodies; further self-study by the 26 institutions included in the study, possibly including return visitations; assisting self-study by institutions not among the original 26; sharing of experience among colleges through regional and state-wide conferences.

The committee posed the following questions for continued consideration:

1. Should college-community cooperation be one of the objectives of higher education?

2. Do the various patterns of college-community cooperation described in the report constitute effective methods of higher education?

If the answer to these questions is substantially yes, the committee proposes the following additional questions:

1. How can training in community relations skills needed both by college and by community be provided in New York State? (This question will be given considerable emphasis at the Tenth Institute.)

2. How can the community and the college work together to finance their cooperative undertaking?

3. How can procedures be developed for providing more integration and coordination?

4. Is there a need for a clearing house for information on college-community cooperation in New York State?

Perhaps the most important conclusion drawn by the Advisory Committee concerns the need on more campuses of "an institutional philosophy and declared policy which views the college as having a major responsibility for community growth and development." In a great many cases at present community cooperation is "haphazard." From this follows the second major need of concrete administrative support. The committee noted that "in some institutions there are already examples of definite commitment of staff and budget to the job of coordinating and developing opportunities for college-community cooperation."

In summary, major needs seem to be a more articulate philosophy, a commitment of staff time and budget,

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training in the human relations and other skills demanded, research into what is most effective and why, and a sharing of experience among colleges and communities.

Conclusions

As to general values of the UCCP thus far, the presidents of the three sponsoring bodies have summed them up as follows:

Alan W. Brown, president of the Citizens' Council and chairman of the Advisory Committee (president of Hobart College): "We are concerned over the need to do an increasingly good job of educating young people for effective citizenship, and we are concerned that communities find the means of solving their own problems. We believe that neither goal can be fully achieved without the other. The study offers convincing evidence that college-community cooperation is a means for achieving both goals."

Carter Davidson, president of the Association of Colleges and Universities (president of Union College): "The study just completed poses important questions that can be answered if colleges and community representatives face them together. A major question is finding the means for the necessary continued expansion of college services to communities. Some of the needed services indicated in the report include training for effective participation in solving community problems, research on human relations, public affairs education."

William S. Carlson, president of the State University of New York: "The study reveals that activities involving college-community cooperation in the State are diverse, extensive, and marked by great resourcefulness. (It) also reveals that only a beginning has been made in tapping the full potential for furthering the educational goals of higher education and at the same time serving the needs of the community. Developing this potential challenges the combined resources of the public and private institutions of the state. It is particularly gratifying that this step toward increased college-community cooperation has been made possible through the cooperation of the Association of Colleges and Universities, the State Citizens' Council, and the State University."

These conclusions stand out. A trend toward increasing college-community cooperation is apparent. The beneficiaries include not only the communities which are finding resources for solving their problems more effectively; above all they include the student and the teacher who find in the community a laboratory for more meaningful learning. As participants in the study emphasized, the primary function of the college remains the education of the individual. College-community cooperation, respecting the integrity both of college and of community, is a means to this end. It is also the college's best means of winning community support. Badly needed financial support should result as the community becomes increasingly aware of the role the college is playing and can play in the community's growth and development. At the same time, the understanding that results from working together will secure community support should essential academic freedoms come under fire.

(NOTE: A limited number of copies of the full report of this study, *College Community Relationships in New York State,* are available and may be secured by sending $1.00 to help cover cost to The New York State Citizens' Council, 613 E. Genesee St., Syracuse, N. Y.)

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